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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Study on the impact on children of armed conflict

Progress report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993, entitled "Protection of children affected by armed conflicts". In the resolution, the Assembly expressed grave concern about the tragic situation of children in many parts of the world as a result of armed conflicts; urged all Member States to continue seeking comprehensive improvement of the situation with appropriate and concrete measures; and requested bodies and organizations of the United Nations, as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, within the scope of their respective mandates, to cooperate in order to ensure more effective action in addressing the problem of children affected by armed conflicts.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint an expert, working in collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights of the Secretariat and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to undertake a comprehensive study of the question, including the participation of children in armed conflict, as well as the relevance and adequacy of existing standards and to make specific recommendations on ways and means of preventing children from being affected by armed conflicts and of improving the protection of children in armed conflicts and on measures to ensure effective protection of these children, including from indiscriminate use of all weapons of war, especially anti-personnel mines, and to promote their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration, in particular measures to ensure proper medical care and adequate nutrition, taking into account the recommendations by the World Conference on Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Assembly requested Member States and United Nations bodies and

organizations, as well as other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to contribute to the study. The Assembly also requested that a progress report on the study be submitted to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session. Ms. Graca Machel of Mozambique was appointed to undertake the study in question.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

3. In 1993 alone, estimates suggest that more than 32 major and 15 minor conflicts were fought across the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe. Children are not only the unfortunate victims of war, they have increasingly become the specific targets of those fighting, in direct violation of international rules governing the conduct of hostilities. Furthermore, their participation in armed conflict has led them to become the perpetrators as well as the victims of atrocities. The study on the impact of armed conflict on children, the first of its kind in the history of the United Nations, will seek to promote not only awareness but also effective implementation of the rights of children, in particular those guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. This international instrument has already been ratified by 166 States. In accordance with the terms of the resolution, the study will make recommendations to the international community for action in the following areas:

(a) The relevance and adequacy of existing standards;

(b) The reinforcement of preventive measures;

(c) The protection of children in situations of armed conflict, including protection against the impact of the indiscriminate use of all weapons of war, especially anti-personnel land-mines;

(d) The promotion of physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.

III. METHOD OF WORKING

4. The expert will be working in close collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights and UNICEF and will be based at the UNICEF field office in Johannesburg. It is hoped that full-time professional and administrative assistance will be provided jointly by UNICEF and the Centre. The study will seek the guidance and advice of a group of eminent persons made up of individuals of international repute and integrity drawn from every geographic region and representing a wide diversity of political, religious and cultural backgrounds, who will provide conceptual and practical content to the study as well as act as public advocates for its work. The study will also seek the counsel of a technical advisory group composed of men and women with recognized international expertise in the four areas to be studied and in the welfare of children in general, who will ensure that the study will benefit from the highest standards of accuracy and

professionalism. Both groups are expected to meet at least three times over the course of the study.

5. In order to ensure the coordinated response of the major international bodies representing the rights of children in armed conflict, an inter-agency task force will also meet regularly at Geneva. Participants will include representatives from the Centre for Human Rights, the Department for Humanitarian Affairs, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), ICRC, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO. An opportunity to participate will also be given to representatives of non-governmental organizations.

6. Wide-ranging consultations at regional level are also envisaged. Such consultations will be organized in collaboration with the Inter-agency Task Force, the regional economic commissions and other international agencies and non-governmental organizations. National institutions, ministries of health and social welfare, human rights organizations, the media, religious organizations, independent experts and eminent leaders within civil society will be closely consulted in the elaboration of the study. Military authorities will also be consulted in conjunction with Governments, particularly with regard to the application of international humanitarian and human rights law and the reinforcement of preventive measures.

7. Extensive consultations will also be undertaken at the national level, incorporating field visits and case-studies, and will involve non-governmental organizations, youth and community organizations, religious groups, agencies, national institutions and other interested parties. Countries selected for field visits in each region will be those that have experienced armed conflict or are still in the throes of such conflict. Consideration will be given to programmes designed to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children within their families and communities. Testimony will be taken from women and children regarding possible violations of their human rights in war and conflict situations. The study will also look at the impact of violence on children and youth and draw upon the experiences of countries that are still dealing with the long-term consequences of armed conflict.

IV. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

8. Work on the study began in August 1994. In view of its broad scope and complexity, the study is expected to take approximately two years to complete, with a final report to be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. An interim report on progress will be presented to the Assembly at its fiftieth session. In accordance with paragraph 10 of resolution 48/157, the Commission on Human Rights will be provided with progress reports at its fifty-first and fifty-second sessions.

9. As indicated in paragraph 4 above, funding from United Nations resources will be required to support the expert during the course of the study. Resources will also be required for the meetings of eminent persons and the

Technical Advisory group, the travel of the expert to such meetings and to various regions and countries, and for other purposes. The expert, in conjunction with the Centre for Human Rights and UNICEF, and with their combined assistance, feels confident that sufficient support will be provided to achieve the goals of the study.

V. CONCLUSIONS

10. The study on the impact on children of armed conflict will seek to give new coherence and fresh impetus to the efforts of the international community to protect children and children's rights from the pernicious effects of armed conflicts. Inputs from the international, regional and national spheres will be combined to form a comprehensive appraisal of the needs of children and will make specific recommendations for action to the national, regional and international communities to enable them to respond more effectively to those needs. The Secretary-General calls upon the members of the United Nations to provide the expert with all necessary assistance to ensure the realization of those objectives.